THE RECOVERY.

A Story of Kentucky

(Continued.)

In this contest, in which, through no choice of my own, I was pitted against him, I studied his methods closely, and I felt that I was learning much from him. But I did not borrow from Harrison when it came to the use of personal irony. As I have said already, anybody can be a wit of the kind that generally passes for such if he has no regard for the feeling of others.

The night before the taking of the vote I was so uneasy that I put on my overcoat and walked two or three hours in the darkness, strolling far out on the hills.

Then I came back slowly, down the hills through the town and to the hotel. At the ladies' entrance a man sprang from a carriage that had just stopped and helped out a lady. The man was Harrison. I saw his face distinctly in the electric light, and I should have known his figure in the darkness. The lady wrapped in a heavy coak looked up at Harrison, and I saw Pauline Harmon. But it was the look on her face, not the woman herself or the fact that she was there, that surprised me. There is a certain look which a woman gives to one man, and one who has seen much of people always knows it.

I turned away toward the main entrance, but Pauline Harmon quickly entered the hotel, and Harrison, dismissing the carriage, followed me. When he stopped me with some ordinary remark, I felt that I could take a liberty that he had often taken with me, and I said:

"What is begun in jest or for a passing fancy may be carried too far?"

"What do you mean?" he asked, with a quick uplifting of his head.

"A woman can never be played with," I replied. "Either she or the man must suffer."

He seemed surprised at first, but became thoughtful and said no more.

I was in the House early the next morning, and, assuming an indifference that I did not feel, I read my letters while the Members assembled.

I looked now and then at the lobbies, which were rapidly filling up, and I wondered when Alicia would come—that she would come I never doubted—and presently I saw her enter with her mother. There was just a little touch of color in her dress, but her face was white like snow, not the white of illness, but the white of long sadness and sorrow. She and Mrs. Warren sat down together, and she looked slowly around the House, bowed slightly to those whom she knew. Grey came in later, and took a seat about a dozen feet away. Pauline Harmon was on the other side of the lobby, quietly dressed and saying but little. I noticed that she watched Harrison attentively.

As the Clerk began to call the roll my confidence rose, I believed that fair play would triumph over partisanship. The C's were reached, and my name was called. I voted for the passage of the Peden Bill, and as the Clerk went on down the line I began to feel sure that we should win. I glanced first at Harrison, and I believe that he read the verdict as I had read it. His face fell, a little, not much, but in a moment he was composed, and began to whisper something amusing to his neighbors.

The calling of the roll was finished and the Peden Bill was passed by a majority of eight. That it would pass subsequently in the Senate was known already, and it was now as good as a law. The House and the lobbies, despite the Speaker's gavel, broke into cheering, and Peden, leaning over, grasped me by the hand.

"Clarke," he said, "it's you who have passed the bill that bears my name."

"Nonsense!" I replied. "It was the great merits of the bill you drew that did it."

"No," he said. "It was you who led the fight and who did most of the fighting. The result means much to me, but more to you, Clarke."

I did not then pay much attention to his words, but the meaning of them came to me later. I was occupied for the present with my friends, with the exchange of congratulations, and with comments on the contest that had ended so happily for us. Harrison came over to me, and so far as I could see there was no sign of depression on his face; for all that his manner disclosed he might have won the victory.

"You've beaten us in a fair fight, Mr. Clarke," he said, "and I offer you my congratulations."

He held out his hand, and I could not do anything then but take it. I felt sure that he must feel the sting of defeat, but I admired the skill with which he hid it. I glanced again at the lobby, and meeting Alicia's calm smile, that told me so much, I felt more than repaid for all the long struggle and its heartburnings. Harrison's eyes followed mine, and he frowned, but he said nothing, quickly recovering his equanimity. A few minutes later I saw him leaving the house just behind Pauline Harmon.

Alicia and her mother departed the next day for Louisville, and, knowing the time of their departure, I appeared at the railroad station, as if by chance. Grey was there, too, although he intended to come back the following morning to Frankfort, but I approached them boldly—any casual acquaintance had the right—and wished the ladies a pleasant journey to Louisville, with a speedy return to Frankfort if they found it possible. Mrs. Warren replied formally, but Alicia put her small gloved hand in mine for a moment. Grey made a surly acknowledgment with a word or two, and then the train went away with them.

I watched the cloud of white smoke following the train long after the train itself was out of sight, and, although I was glad Alicia was gone, I knew that her presence in Frankfort had been a support and inspiration to me. But it was a bitter pain to see her go away with that man Grey, his by right, while I who would have protected and defended her, who would have made her a queen if I could, was left behind, and alone.

As I walked away I met Jimmy Warfield. He knew what had happened, and I think he knew my feelings, too, as he said nothing, but with the silent and instinctive sympathy that is so precious went on by my side. He did not speak for a full five minutes, and then he said:

"The newspapers that have come in today, Harry, are full of you. Your name has spread throughout the State."

His news would have gratified me greatly at another time, but at present my thoughts were elsewhere, and I thanked him, somewhat absently I fear. Yet he told only the truth, as I found later, when my mind returned to the subject. I received a credit from the press far beyond anything that I deserved, and, in private, I often blushed for myself when I read those flattering accounts. Yet I found myself forced into a certain conspicuous position from which I could not escape, and which seemed to endure.

But the Legislature was now quickly approaching adjournment. We separated at last with mingled pleasure and regrets, and on a glorious day in early May I left the train at Carlton just as I had left it two or three years before, but now under circumstances so different.

When I alighted from the train Aunt Jane walked straight up to me, kissed me—which was much for her—and said, "Harry, we are glad to have our boy back again, and to know that he is a great man now." A member of the Legislature was a great man to Aunt Jane. Uncle Paul merely shook my hand, but what a shake it was! Uncle Paul's hands are made of a sort of tempered iron, not flesh and bone, and his muscle is renowned throughout the country.

I rambled about the estate and the neighborhood for nearly a week, usually going to bed just after dark and rising at the earliest dawn. I scorned work, I did not look at a book, I did not unfold a newspaper, but I trod all the ancient haunts of my childhood. Aunt Jane and Uncle Paul did not disturb me; they were too happy to have me with them, and I think they would have been content to have me go on in that way indefinitely.

One evening as the three of us sat in the dusk on the porch, Uncle Paul and I smoking, he asked me:

"What are your plans for the summer, Harry?"

"I haven't any," I replied, "except that next month I shall go down to the convention at Lexington to see the Democrats nominate a candidate for the Governorship."

It had been decided that the convention should be held at Lexington early in June, and I expected to be chosen a delegate.

Uncle Paul smoked thoughtfully and looked out at the line of the forest on the far side of the fields. I could just see his grave, meditative face in the dusk. Aunt Jane was knitting, and the click of her needles was regular music.

"Who'll be the man, Harry?" asked Uncle Paul, after a long pause.

"I haven't the least idea," I replied.

"Grey's after it hot and hard."

"Maybe so, but he'll never touch it."

"I should hope not," said Uncle Paul, with deep emphasis.

"There's Judge Wharton," I said. "He'd make a fine Governor, but I don't believe we could get him to leave the Court of Appeals."

"No, I don't believe you could."

Uncle Paul relapsed into silence and the bowl of his pipe glowed in the dusk. I was silent, too. He had set my thoughts travelling on a road they had often trod before. The question of a nominee bothered me. I had spoken of it two or three times to Jimmy Warfield before I left him at Louisville, but in his light way he had been either evasive or careless. Judge Wharton, in good truth, would make an admirable Governor, but he was wedded to the Court of Appeals. Surveying the field, I could not see any available material. Was it possible that Grey might secure the nomination by default? It was the first time such a thought had come to me, and I shuddered at it.

CHAPTER XIV.

The People's Choice.

I spent a happy month with Uncle Paul and Aunt Jane, a month of play, and then the call of the clans came again. I was duly elected a delegate to the State Democratic convention, and early in June I went to Lexington to attend it and to help make the next Governor. An entire State ticket was to be nominated, but the interest centered on the governorship, because of its uncertainty. Grey had continued his campaign with great vigor, that is with the use of money which he thought so effective, and Harrison was still acting as his lieutenant. There were five or six other candidates, all obscure mediocre men, though respectable.

When I reached the city, I saw that the Grey delegates and supporters were arriving in great force, with all the whoop and noise that impress the unobservant so much. The city was pervaded by the Grey forces, they were talking Grey everywhere, and in the lobbies of the hotels they were claiming that he was as good as nominated. It was easy enough to see through it all. It is a common device at conventions to attempt a stampede to a candidate who seems far in the lead, and sometimes it succeeds. Harrison, if not Grey, was shrewd enough to see the opportunity and he was making the most of it.

I met Harrison at the entrance to the convention hall, and he seemed in high spirits.

"I think I've got you this time, Mr. Clarke," he said, "you beat me on that apportionment bill, and I didn't like it, I'm frank to say, but I'm going to put Grey through and make him the next Governor."

I made an ambiguous reply, and turning away entered the convention hall, more resolved than ever that we should beat Grey, but further than ever from a knowledge how to do it.

I recognized a new note as soon as the convention met. Much of the old suavity and courtesy was gone, it was no longer "my learned friend," or "my distinguished friend," when political foe addressed political foe on the floor, but it was the personal attack full of acrimony and hostility, men sought to override each other, to attain the end by any means they could, in short we led to the full what was then popularly called "the strenuous life," and I am frank to confess that I did not like it.

The first day was a series of unbroken triumphs for Grey. Harrison controlled the convention and carried everything as he wished it to go. Never was there a finer illustration of the old proverb that in union there is strength. The Grey forces, united, were invincible, we, divided, were beaten whenever we made a fight. As Jimmy Warfield whispered to me: "The only thing we can do is to run, and we don't seem to be such good runners either."

Grey was suffused with triumph, and he would have made a great display of it had Harirson let him, but his skillful manager kept him, for the time being, in a state of suppression.

We held a meeting that evening in Judge Wharton's room and I brought up the subject of his candidacy, but he would not hear to it, declining with an emphasis that was little short of being abrupt. Then we talked about three hours and as before all the talk came to nothing. I felt sick and disgusted, and as all my suggestions had been snubbed I decided to leave the meeting, go to my own room, and sleep if I could.

I rose and announced that I would withdraw as we seemed to me to be wasting time, and to my surprise no one made any objection. I was hurt much hurt, at this proof of indifference from old friends, personal as well as political, and with a brief good night I left the room.

We met again the next morning with a great attendance of both delegates and spectators, and before the convention was a half hour old, I noticed a new feeling in the opposition It was not a thing that one could see with the eye, or hear with the ear, but it was perceived rather by the undefined and unknown sixth sense. It was a note of union, of hope, and of confidence, but when I sought to trace it to its ultimate source I found that I was on the outside.

The morning passed on and the time for the nominations came. Harrison put the name of Grey before the delegates and he did it extremely well. He sat down amid thunders of applause, which died, rose and died again and again. When they died for the last time, a dead silence of a minute or two followed, and then the oldest delegate in the convention, a man with snow-white hair, who had served in more than a dozen Legislatures, rose and spoke in a voice wonderfully full and clear for one so old.

He had a nominee, he said, and as I glanced at Warfield and the others, I felt convinced that they had settled upon a man. They were calling for a business administration, the aged speaker continued. Well, his nominee would give them one. They were calling for method, order and economy; his nominee would give them as much of those things as they liked or could stand; they wanted a man who would lead the "strenuous life"; his candidate already led it, and did not know how to lead any other; they wanted a young man; his candidate had youth to spare.

The venerable orator paused here, and I sat up in wonder. There was deep silence, too, in the hall, save for the tense breathing of the delegates and the spectators. I saw a look of amazement on Harrison's face; clearly he was as puzzled as I about the unknown paragon, who was about to be put in nomination, but his look of surprise was reinforced by a look of alarm.

"I name for you," said the old orator, "a man who has already done the State great service, I name for you a man who will command your unqualified admiration and support, I name for you a man who will lead you to victory as certainly as the sun shines on old Kentucky. I name for you the Honorable Henry Clarke of Sumpter County."

He turned his gaze full upon me as he pronounced my name and I was dumbfounded. I had never aspired to such an honor. I had never dreamed of it. Now I understood why they had been willing for me to leave the room the night before, why they had kept me out of the secret. I looked at Jimmy Warfield, and his face bore a broad smile of confidence, comradeship and congratulation. Then I glanced at Harrison and I met a furious gaze, so full of rage and accusation, that I was startled. He seemed to say, "You are a traitor, you have sprung this scheme from the dark and at the last moment to surprise and beat us." I do not claim to be a meek man and my blood leaped up to meet his threat and challenge. I think that otherwise I should have declined the nomination, but I could not let myself be browbeaten by Harrison—he had no claim on me, just the contrary—and settling back in my seat, I returned his look with another of defiance.

The convention, delegates and spectators, burst into thunders of applause. I do not know why my name pleased them, but it seemed to do so, and the cheers rolled up in increasing volume. Among the spectators many ladies were waving their handkerchiefs.

That great, that indescribable thrill of triumph shot through me again; the overwhelming applause of one's countrymen is a heady, an intoxicating thing, and I do not wonder that the men who have drunk deeply of it have thought themselves on the steps just below the gods and have done foolish things. There is nothing in this world just like it.

I arose quickly and left the hall, as it was no longer meet that I, whose name had been put before the convention, should stay there, and take part in its deliberations. It was my first intention to go at once to my hotel, but I changed it and walked out into the country to steady my nerves. It all seemed wonderful, but I knew it was true, that I, who had been a convict, who was yet under thirty, should be the Governor—I had a premonition as certain to me as fact that I should be both nominated and elected. Never had the wheel of fortune made a more violent revolution.

I must have walked two or three hours—I was not able to take thought of time—and with my mingled emotions under better control, I turned back to the city, and entered my hotel. The first man who met me there was Grey himself, and all his true nature showed at once. He seemed to make no effort to keep his passions under, but, his face flushed and his hands clinching and unclinching, reproached me with foul names and personal abuse.

"Stop," I said—I had made up my mind to take no nonsense from him—"I have as much right as you to run for Governor. I was not one of your supporters, I was against you, I told you that frankly, and if I have friends enough to nominate me, I shall not try to keep them from doing it."

"It is secret! Underhand! You are always in my way!" he said thickly.

I hate a vulgar brawl, and I was very glad at that moment to see Harrison approaching. He had recovered his self-command, and was once more his light and jeering self. He put his hand upon Grey's arm and his touch was the command of the superior man to the inferior. Grey seemed to shrink physically.

"Come, Mr. Grey, " said Harrison calmly. "We are not beaten yet. Mr. Clarke, as he says, has a right to run, although he had never led us to expect such a thing."

"I did not expect it myself," I said, and then angry that I should have said a single word of a defensive nature, I added:

"But had it been otherwise, it would not have altered my right."

(To be Continued.)